

# Employee well-being attribution and job change intentions: The moderating effect of task idiosyncratic deals

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## Abstract

We developed and tested a research model in which employee well-being human resource (HR) attribution differentially influences the intention to change jobs across organizations (i.e., external job change intention) versus that within the same organization (i.e., internal job change intention). Furthermore, we posited that task idiosyncratic deals (I-deals) moderated the relationships between employee well-being HR attribution and external and internal job change intentions. Results indicated that employee well-being HR attribution was negatively related to external job change intention, but positively related to internal job change intention. Further, task I-deals significantly moderated the relationships between employee well-being HR attribution and external and internal job change intention. Specifically, employee well-being HR attribution played a less important role in reducing external job change intention when task I-deals were high rather than low. On the other hand, high task I-deals significantly strengthened the positive relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and internal job change intention. Our study extends the careers literature by differentiating the impact of employee well-being HR attribution on job change intentions within an organization compared with that across organizations and the important role of supervisors in enhancing or mitigating these effects.

## KEYWORDS

employee well-being HR attribution, external job change intention, internal job change intention, task idiosyncratic deals

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Jobs are at the heart of the employment relationship and are considered the building blocks of careers (Baruch & Rosenstein, 1992). Careers research has evolved from focusing on traditional organizational careers (i.e., job movements inside an organization) to a model characterized by increased job mobility across and within organizational boundaries (Lyons, Schweitzer, & Ng, 2015; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). However, external job changes (i.e., changes in jobs across organizational boundaries) and internal job changes (i.e., changes in jobs

within an organization) may have different implications for the organization and the employee (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012). For example, research on job changes (e.g., Bidwell & Keller, 2014; Bidwell & Mollick, 2015; DeVaro & Morita, 2013) have shown the different effects of external and internal job changes on the career outcomes of employees and their ultimate impact on firm performance.

Despite these advances, existing studies have yet to examine the differences between external and internal job change intentions. External job change intention is defined as the intention to change jobs by moving to a different organization. Internal job change

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intention refers to the desire to make “any substantial changes in work responsibilities, hierarchical levels, or titles within an organization” (Feldman & Ng, 2007: p. 352), including upward and lateral job change intentions. Examining job change intentions is important because job change intentions affect employee career development (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) including actual job changes in one's career (Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012). In the present study, we aimed to extend careers research by examining the impact of different stakeholders (e.g., organizations and supervisors) on employee external and internal job change intentions. Multiple stakeholders, such as organizations and direct supervisors can play an important role in employee careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) despite the shifting of career development responsibility to individual employees (Gubler, Arnold, & Coombs, 2014). Specifically, we focused on employee well-being HR attribution (i.e., employee perceptions that HR practices exist for enhancing employee well-being, Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008) to represent organizational practices, and task I-deals (i.e., personalized agreements on job contents and work responsibilities between employees and their supervisor, Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006) as supervisory practices promoting employee career development. Both represent coherent organizational and supervisory practices in the eyes of employees that aim to promote their career development. Taking this multi-stakeholder perspective, we proposed a framework that connects employee perceptions of or experiences with organizational and supervisory practices to different job change intentions.

First, we examined how employee well-being HR attribution, a special type of employee perceptions of organizational HR practices, relates to external and internal job change intentions. Advances in the HR literature have highlighted the importance of understanding employees' attribution about why HR practices exist (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Sanders, Shipton, & Gomes, 2014). By examining how employees' HR attribution affect job change intentions, we extend the careers research because employees' careers through different job movements can be affected by their attributions on a firm's HR practices, such as selection, performance appraisal, training and development, and career management. Conceptually, employee well-being HR attribution can engender perceptions of support for their career development from the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), which enhances employees' intention to pursue their careers within the firm (Guest, 2017). Scholars have also shown that employee well-being HR attribution negatively relates to external job change intention (Chen & Wang, 2014; Tandung, 2016) and increases job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008; van de Voorde & Beijer, 2015). That is, employee well-being HR attribution is clearly associated with employees' career development, and thus has a great potential to influence both external and internal job change intention.

In addition to organizational HR practices, supervisors can play a central role in developing employee careers because they determine the job characteristics of employees (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006) by offering flexibility and individualization of the job. Supervisor-level practices are influential because supervisors directly interact with

employees and have the power to offer idiosyncratic deals that promote employee careers. Thus, we examine how supervisory agreement on changes to job design can moderate the relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and external and internal job change intentions. Specifically, we examine whether idiosyncratic deals regarding tasks and work responsibility (task I-deals) moderate the relationships between employee well-being HR attribution and external and internal job change intentions. We expect that high task I-deals would replace the effects of employee well-being HR attribution on external job change intention. That is, with high task I-deals, employees would be satisfied with their jobs, and thus employee well-being HR attribution can play a less important role in reducing external job change intention. Moreover, high task I-deals can strengthen the positive relationship between employee well-being attribution and internal job change intention because employees feel support for their career development from both their organization and supervisor and thus are more likely to develop careers through internal job changes.

To sum up, we provide a framework that connects HR attribution theory (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008) and task I-deals (job design based on the agreement between an employee and a supervisor) to job mobility theory. Doing so renders several contributions. First, we enhance our understanding of the differences between external and internal job change intentions, as different mindsets of career development (Ng, Sorensen, Eby, & Feldman, 2007; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Second, we extend job mobility literature by incorporating HR attribution theory in examining the antecedents of job change intentions. In doing so, we highlight the importance of employee attributions of a firm's HR practices in understanding their desire to develop career inside or outside the firm. Third, we investigated the combined effects of employee well-being HR attribution, employee perceptions of organizational practices related to their career development, and task I-deals, employee experiences with their supervisor related to their career development, on external and internal job change intentions. This multi-focus perspective extends the careers literature by considering employee attributions of organizational HR practices and supervisor-employee dyadic actions on different job change mindsets (cf. Ng, Sorensen, Eby, & Feldman, 2007).

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

### 2.1 | Job change intentions

Job mobility refers to intra and interorganizational changes over the career of an employee (Sullivan, 1999). In advancing job mobility theory, Ng, Sorensen, Eby, and Feldman (2007) examined different types of mobility by developing a typology, which delineates mobility using the dimensions of employer (external vs. internal to the organization) and status of job movement (lateral, upward, or downward). However, most existing careers research have focused on external job changes (i.e., Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003) without examining internal job changes. Nevertheless, many job changes still occur within the same organization (Rodrigues & Guest, 2010).

Job mobility scholars are interested in examining the different mindsets of changing jobs on employee outcomes (Feldman & Ng, 2007) because not all desires to change jobs result in actual job changes (Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012). Following the existing typology of job mobility (Ng, Sorensen, Eby, & Feldman, 2007), Feldman and Ng (2007) proposed that structural, organizational, and individual factors affect external and internal job change intentions differently. For example, social support is related to internal job change intention (De Janasz & Sullivan, 2004), whereas time demands and work-life conflicts are related to external job change intention (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). However, there is a need to understand how employee perceptions of organizational HR practices (e.g., employee HR attribution) may affect both external and internal job change intentions (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Ng, Sorensen, Eby, & Feldman, 2007).

HR scholars have examined different types of employee HR attributions (Hewett, Shantz, Mundy, & Alfes, 2018). For example, Nishii, Lepak, and Schneider (2008) initially investigated five distinct attributions and combined these attributions into three dimensions, namely, external attribution (e.g., union compliance), commitment-focused (e.g., achieving the firm's strategic goal of service quality or enhancing employee-well-being), and control-focused (e.g., cost reduction). In this study, we did not examine "achieving the firm's strategic goal of service quality" because it is not directly related to employee well-being including career development. We also did not expect the control-focused dimension to directly impact such job change intentions. Conceptually, cost reduction, the major focus of control-focused attribution, can be achieved through low pay or low investment in employees. However, cost reduction can also be realized through operational excellence or technological advancements (and thus high productivity). Hence, control-focused attribution does not necessarily lead to external job change intention. Indeed, empirical studies have found such attribution to have mixed impacts with either no direct impact (Chen & Wang, 2014) or a positive impact (Tandung, 2016) on external job change intention. Therefore, we focused on employee well-being HR attribution that is most likely to influence an employee's career through both internal and external job change intention. In doing so, we remain consistent with our framework to identify both organizational and supervisor level practices conducive to career development and examine their joint effect. In the next section, we discuss how employee well-being HR attribution relates to internal and external job change intentions.

## 2.2 | Employee well-being HR attribution and job change intentions

We propose that employee well-being attribution significantly relate to external and internal job change intention. According to attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 2008), individuals make causal inferences about specific events or target objects, which can impact their attitudinal or behavioral response toward them. Applied to the HR context, employees can make casual inferences about why certain HR practices exist (Koys, 1988) which in turn affect employee attitudes toward their organizations and jobs such as an intention to develop

their career with the firm or outside firm. For example, employee well-being HR attribution implies that employees perceive that HR practices are in place due to an underlying employee-oriented management philosophy and that their firm's HR practices intend to bring positive consequences for employees (e.g., Osterman, 1994). As a result, employees high on well-being HR attribution may respond to such attribution with positive attitudes toward the organization, and are more likely to feel obligated to reciprocate the favors of the organization (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008). For example, when employees interpret HR practices as valuing them or promoting their well-being, employees feel obligated to reciprocate (Takeuchi, Chen, & Lepak, 2009). Employees tend to respond to these perceived favorable practices from the organization through positive attitudes and behaviors toward the organization (Kooij et al., 2013). To support for this, previous studies have shown that employees with a high well-being HR attribution tend to have strong organizational commitment (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008; Van de Voorde & Beijer, 2015). Extrapolating from this, we expect employee well-being HR attribution to reduce employees' intention to leave the organization.

On the other hand, we expect a positive relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and internal job change intention for several reasons. First, employee well-being HR attribution stemming from an underlying perception of a well-being management philosophy of the organization connotes positive implications for employees (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008). Such HR attribution may encourage employees to enhance their own well-being that are consistent with such perceived management philosophy. Specifically, employees may consider enhancing their own well-being through the use of career development and career opportunities (Guest, 2017). In addition, employees with high well-being HR attribution can interpret that existing HR practices, ranging from hiring, pay and benefits, performance appraisal, training and development, and career development (e.g., job rotation), are implemented by the organization for their own well-being (van de Voorde & Beijer, 2015). With such attribution, employees are motivated to advance their career through seeking out interesting jobs within the firm. Relatedly, employee well-being HR attribution can engender a sense of support from their organization for employees to develop their careers inside the organization (cf. Chen & Wang, 2014), which helps employees find other jobs or positions within the organization as a way to enhance their careers (Armstrong-Stassen & Ursel, 2009; Ng & Feldman, 2014; Sullivan, 2011). Taken together, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 1** *Employee well-being HR attribution is (a) negatively related to external job change intention, but (b) positively related to internal job change intention.*

## 2.3 | Moderating role of task-idiosyncratic deals

We have discussed how employee well-being HR attribution may negatively relate to external job change intention but positively relate to internal job change intention. In this section, we discuss a potential

contextual variable that could moderate the relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and the two different types of job change intentions. While an organization has its own practices, supervisors often have discretion in the task arrangement for individual employees who can also negotiate their specific employment conditions with their supervisor (Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006). The ways that supervisors organize specific employment conditions in the job for each employee can influence the relationship of employee well-being HR attribution with employee attitudes and intentions (cf. Rosen, Slater, Chang, & Johnson, 2013). Among the supervisory practices that can affect employees' job experiences, task I-deals are essential in managing careers (i.e., job change) in organizations (De Vos & Cambré, 2017). Initial predefined tasks and job responsibilities can be adjusted based on a mutual agreement between the employee and his/her supervisor. For example, an employee may be assigned additional roles or tasks that help him/her develop different skills based on the negotiation with his or her supervisor (Rousseau, Hornung, & Kim, 2009). Task I-deals result in positive employee attitudes due to a favorable change in job characteristics (Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer, & Weigel, 2010).

We focus on task I-deals for the following reasons. First, task I-deals are one of the most commonly used components for job redesign and are central in influencing employee attitudes (Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer, & Weigel, 2010). Second, while HR practices are general to an employee group, an establishment, or even a whole organization, and can affect employee job change intention, actual job content varies from one individual to another depending on the agreement with one's supervisor. Task I-deals capture the idiosyncratic between-individual variation in job content, which can affect an employee's desire to leave the organization for another job or change his or her current job within the organization. Prior research on HR practices and employee attribution missed this important supervisor-employee dyadic level contingency.

From a social exchange perspective, task I-deals can enhance employees' feeling of obligation of reciprocity (Ng & Feldman, 2015), affective commitment (Ng & Feldman, 2010), and commitment to the supervisor (Rosen, Slater, Chang, & Johnson, 2013), thereby highlighting its importance. We expect that task I-deals work together with employee well-being HR attribution to influence external job change intention. Employees with high task I-deals are more likely satisfied with their supervisor and subsequently commit to the organization because their supervisor allowed them to change their job contents according to their demands (Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer, & Weigel, 2010). Thus, with high task I-deals, employees may be less likely to intend to leave the organization, which makes the role of employee well-being in external job change intention less important. However, when task I-deals are low (i.e., a supervisor does not provide employees with specific arrangements to change aspects of their jobs), the well-being HR attribution stemming from the generic organizational HR practices become more important in affecting external job change intention. For example, when employees do not enjoy I-deals in their jobs (i.e., low task I-deals), their attribution that organizational HR practices are in place for

their well-being can play a more prominent role in reducing their desires to leave the organization for a new job. To sum up, we present the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2** *Task I-deals moderate the negative relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and external job change intention, such that the relationship becomes weaker as task I-deals increase.*

We expect task I-deals to moderate the relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and internal job change intention. When task I-deals are high (i.e., when the supervisor and employee agree to extra responsibilities, skill development, and responsibilities outside of formal job requirements in a negotiated agreement), employees can develop new skills based on negotiated changes to their job (Rosen, Slater, Chang, & Johnson, 2013). One reason that employees seek task I-deals is to increase their personal development by developing new skills (Hornung, Rousseau, Weigl, Mueller, & Glaser, 2014). As high task I-deals occur due to a strong support from their supervisor (Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer, & Weigel, 2010), employees may perceive high task I-deals as encouraging their future development and well-being, further enhancing their desire to find a new job within the organization, which is more aligned with their newly developed skills resulting from a high employee well-being HR attribution. High task I-deals synergize with employee well-being HR attribution to reinforce each other in shaping internal job change intention. By contrast, when task I-deals are low, supervisors do not agree to idiosyncratic changes to the tasks in the jobs and discourage employees from seeking new tasks and responsibilities. This supervisory practice is sending a contrasting message from organizational HR practices associated with employee well-being HR attribution, attenuating the positive effect of employee well-being HR attribution on internal job change intention. We thus present the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3** *Task I-deals moderate the positive relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and internal job change intention, such that the relationship becomes stronger as task I-deals increase.*

## 3 | METHOD

### 3.1 | Sample and procedures

We collected data from a company located in Northern China. This company operates 4S (sales, spare parts, service, and survey) automobile sales service shops. The top management team agreed to allow their employees from 18 automobile 4S stores to participate in our study on the condition that we provide a consulting report. Before the survey, the HR Department helped us inform all eligible participants about this research project and to invite them to participate in the surveys. A total of 1,286 employees were invited to participate in our survey. We asked employees to assess employee well-being HR attribution, task I-deals, and external and internal job change intentions.

The HR Department in each store helped us conduct the survey with all eligible participants in a conference room. After giving an introduction on the survey and ensuring them of the confidentiality of the survey results, we distributed the pencil-and-paper-based questionnaires to the interested participants and collected the completed questionnaires on site. They were informed that their involvement was completely voluntary and that they could drop out of the research at any time.

The final sample included 944 employees working in 18 automobile 4S stores, rendering valid response rates of 73.4% from employees. We also obtained archival data of participants' demographic information (e.g., age, sex, and organizational tenure) and a unique ID grouping the employees with their supervisor from the company's HR Department. In our sample, 66% were male with an average age of 27.4 years, 46% were married, and their average tenure in the organization was 3.83 years.

## 3.2 | Measures

The survey items were originally in English and translated to Chinese following the standard back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1986). All variables in this study were assessed using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = "Strongly disagree" and 7 = "Strongly agree").

### 3.2.1 | Employee well-being HR attribution

We measured the employee well-being HR attribution of various HR management functions using the five-item measure proposed by Nishii, Lepak, and Schneider (2008). Employees were asked to assess the extent to which they agreed that specific HR practices in the organization (hiring, pay and benefits, performance appraisal, training and development, career development, scheduling, etc.) were implemented to enhance employee well-being.

### 3.2.2 | External job change intention

To assess external job change intention, we adopted Wayne, Shore, and Liden's (1997) scale measuring turnover intention. From the original five-item scale, we deleted two items that did not clearly specify whether an employee intended to leave the organization to find another job in a different company ("I am seriously thinking about quitting my job at this organization" and "I often think about quitting my job at this organization"). Hence, we used the following three items, which we deemed best for assessing an employee's intention to leave the organization for another job: "As soon as I can find a better job, I'll leave this organization," "I think I will be working at another organization in the future," and "I am actively looking for a job outside this organization." The factor loadings of these three items were 0.57, 0.88, and 0.87, respectively.

### 3.2.3 | Internal job change intention

To measure internal job change intention, we adopted the job change intention scale developed by Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh (1983) and Van Veldhoven and Meijman (1994). We revised the original items to specify job change intention *within* the same organization to distinguish from external job change intention. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the following statements: "I would prefer to do a different type of work within the same organization," "I might search for a different type of job within the same organization," and "I would like to become trained to do a different type of job within the same organization." The factor loadings of these three items were 0.82, 0.86, and 0.81, respectively.

### 3.2.4 | Task I-deals

We measured task I-deals using Rosen, Slater, Chang, and Johnson's (2013) six-item measure of I-deals for task and work responsibility. Sample items include the following: "At my request, my supervisor has assigned me tasks that better develop my skills" and "I have negotiated with my supervisor for tasks that better fit my personality, skills, and abilities."

### 3.2.5 | Control variables

We included several control variables that may affect our model results. First, we controlled for employees' demographic information, including age, sex, education level, team tenure, and organizational tenure. We further controlled for the job alternatives within the organization as because this factor may affect employees' internal and external job change intentions. For instance, high internal job alternatives may encourage high internal job change intention while simultaneously discouraging external job change intention. We adopted the four-item measure proposed by Lee and Mowday (1987) and Steel and Griffeth (1989). A sample item for this scale is, "I can find an acceptable alternative to my current job in my organization."

## 3.3 | Analytical strategy

Given that the respondents were nested within supervisors, we conducted hierarchical liner modeling using STATA 14.2 (Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal, 2008) to test our hypotheses. Specifically, we included an intercept for the supervisor level in all models (i.e., a fixed-slope model) to control for any possible fixed effects stemming from supervisor-level factors in the relationships that we tested.

## 4 | RESULTS

We conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) at the individual level to test the distinctiveness of the key self-reported variables (i.e., employee well-being HR attribution, internal job change intention, external job change intention, and task I-deals). The hypothesized five-factor

model (including the control for job alternatives) demonstrates good fit to the data ( $\chi^2(179) = 822.47$ , comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.95, Tucker-Lewis index [TLI] = 0.94, root-mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.06, square root mean residuals [SRMR] = 0.05). These results are better than those of a four-factor model (i.e., combining job change intention and external job change intention,  $\chi^2(183) = 1,356.71$ , CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.07). In addition, we tested whether external job change intention differed from internal job change intention. The two-factor model demonstrates adequate fit to the data based on the “two-index” strategy proposed by other scholars (e.g., SRMR plus another index, such as CFI; Hu & Bentler, 1998) although RMSEA is lower than commonly used criteria, such as 0.08 ( $\chi^2(8) = 140.27$ , CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.13, SRMR = 0.08), and fits better than the one-factor model ( $\chi^2(9) = 512.91$ , CFI = 0.76, TLI = 0.61, RMSEA = 0.24, SRMR = 0.12). These results suggest that external job change intention is distinct from internal job change intention. These results thus support the distinctiveness of the variables used in this study.

The means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations are reported in Table 1. The reliabilities for all measures are acceptable (i.e.,  $\alpha > .70$ ). As expected, employee well-being HR attribution is negatively and significantly correlated with external job change intention ( $r = -.17$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and is positively and significantly correlated with internal job change intention ( $r = .11$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These correlations provide preliminary evidence to support the notion that employee well-being HR attribution has differential impacts on external and internal job change intentions.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that employee well-being HR attribution is negatively related to external job change intention, but positively related to internal job change intention. The results of Model 2 in Table 2 show that employee well-being HR attribution is significantly and negatively related to external job change intention ( $\gamma = -.17$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, Model 5 shows that the employee well-being HR attribution is significantly and positively related to job change

intention within the organization ( $\gamma = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ ), thus providing support for our first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that task I-deals would mitigate the negative effects of employee well-being HR attribution on external job change intention such that the negative relationship becomes weaker as task I-deals increase. Model 3 of Table 2 shows that the interaction term of employee well-being HR attribution and task I-deals is significantly related to external job change intention ( $\gamma = .05$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Specifically, a simple slope test shows that HR employee well-being attribution is significantly and negatively related to external job change intention when task I-deals are high (simple slope =  $-0.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, the negative relationship becomes stronger when task I-deals are low (simple slope =  $-0.24$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These two slopes are significantly different (difference =  $-0.11$ ,  $p < .05$ ), thus providing support for Hypothesis 2. The simple slopes are shown in Figure 1a.

Hypothesis 3 stated that task I-deals would moderate the positive relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and internal job change intention, such that the relationship strengthens as task I-deals increase. As shown in Model 6 in Table 2, the interaction term of employee well-being HR attribution and task-idiosyncratic deals is significantly related to internal job change intention ( $\gamma = .06$ ,  $p < .05$ ). A simple slope test shows that employee well-being HR attribution is significantly and positively related to internal job change intention in employees with relatively high task I-deals (simple slope =  $0.17$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, for employees with low task I-deals, the simple slope is not significant (simple slope =  $0.05$ , *n.s.*). These two slopes are significantly different (difference =  $-0.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 3 is supported with the simple slopes displayed in Figure 1b.

#### 4.1 | Supplementary analysis

We ran additional sensitivity analyses to test the robustness of our results. Specifically, after running our models without any control variables, we find that all significant results remained the same. Also,

**TABLE 1** Individual-level means, standard deviations, and correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Male	0.66	0.47	-										
2. Age	27.36	6.11	-0.15**	-									
3. Education	4.20	1.31	-0.30**	0.01	-								
4. Married	0.46	0.50	-0.11**	0.54**	-0.13**	-							
5. Organizational tenure	3.83	6.80	-0.03	0.12**	-0.02	0.05	-						
6. Team tenure	27.04	24.9	-0.02	0.23**	-0.02	0.19**	0.25**	-					
7. Job alternatives within org	3.87	1.30	-0.11**	-0.10**	0.02	-0.09**	-0.03	0.01	(0.90)				
8. Employee well-being HR attribution	5.33	1.12	0.00	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01	-0.02	-0.05	(0.92)			
9. Internal job change intention	4.37	1.28	0.05	-0.05	0.03	-0.01	-0.03	0.01	0.43**	0.11**	(0.81)		
10. External job change intention	3.70	1.34	0.10**	-0.06	0.01	-0.05	-0.01	0.00	0.56**	-0.17**	0.46**	(0.88)	
11. Task I-deals	4.91	1.11	0.04	-0.03	0.03	-0.04	-0.02	-0.05	0.09**	0.62**	0.17**	-0.01	(0.91)

Note:  $N = 944$ ; reliability coefficients on the diagonal (where applicable). All variables are at Time 1, except for supervisor-rated job performance, which is at Time 2.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**TABLE 2** HLM results for employee well-being HR attribution and task I-deals on internal and external job change intention

Variable	External job change intention			Internal job change intention		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Intercept	1.36** (0.26)	1.33** (0.26)	1.32** (0.26)	2.65** (0.27)	2.66** (0.27)	2.65** (0.27)
<i>Control variables</i>						
Male	0.11 (0.08)	0.12 (0.08)	0.11 (0.08)	0.04 (0.09)	0.04 (0.08)	0.03 (0.08)
Age	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)
Education	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
Married	0.01 (0.09)	0.01 (0.09)	0.01 (0.09)	0.13 (0.09)	0.13 (0.09)	0.12 (0.09)
Organizational tenure	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Team tenure	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Job alternatives	0.57** (0.03)	0.57** (0.03)	0.56** (0.03)	0.43** (0.03)	0.43** (0.03)	0.42** (0.03)
Employee well-being HR attribution (EHRA)		−0.17** (0.03)	−0.18** (0.04)		0.15** (0.03)	0.11* (0.04)
Task I-deals (TID)			0.04 (0.04)			0.07 (0.05)
EHRA × TID			0.05* (0.03)			0.06* (0.03)
<i>Model fit statistics</i>						
Within R <sup>2</sup>	.299	.312	.321	.188	.200	.203
Between R <sup>2</sup>	.349	.383	.382	.151	.168	.179
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.319	.338	.342	.191	.207	.215
−Log-likelihood	1,432	1,418	1,414	1,475	1,466	1,461
ΔLog-likelihood (χ <sup>2</sup> )	–	14 (27)**	4 (7)*	–	9 (19)**	5 (10)**

Note:  $N = 944$  at employee level,  $N = 305$  at supervisor level. Unstandardized coefficients are reported; values in parentheses are standard errors.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; employee well-being HR attribution (EHRA), task I-deals (TID) are grand-mean centered.

given that the data were nested within 18 4S stores, we checked the variance across stores and supervisors for the key variables using a three-level null model (Level 1-employees, Level 2-supervisor, and Level 3-store). For internal job change intention as the dependent variable,  $ICC1_{supervisor} = 0.02$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $ICC1_{store} = 9.53e-14$ , *n.s.*; for external job change intention,  $ICC1_{supervisor} = 0.08$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $ICC1_{store} = 0.003$ ,  $p < .05$ . These results suggest that there is significant between-supervisor variance but a very small between-store variance, and thus it is more appropriate to use a two-level rather than three-level model. However, as supplementary analyses, we ran a three-level analyses with individuals at Level 1, supervisors at Level 2, and stores at Level 3. The results were very similar to those for two-level analyses. Specifically, employee well-being HR attribution is negatively related to external job change intention ( $\gamma = -.17$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but positively related to internal job change intention ( $\gamma = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ ) in support of Hypothesis 1. The interaction between employee well-being HR attribution and task I-deals is significant for both external job change intention ( $\gamma = .05$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and internal job change intention ( $\gamma = .06$ ,  $p < .05$ ), providing support for Hypotheses 2 and 3. The conclusions from the three-level analysis are consistent with our results from the two-level analysis.

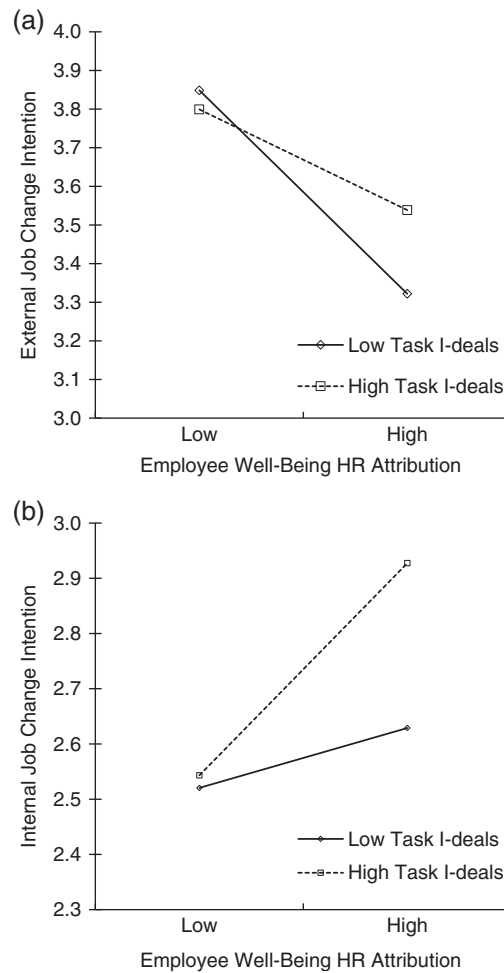
## 5 | DISCUSSION

Our findings enhance our understanding of the different mindsets of job change by examining the antecedent and consequence of both

internal and external job change intention. Supporting prior research, we found that employee well-being HR attribution was negatively related to external job change intention. Extending this research, we found that employee well-being HR attribution was positively related to internal job change intention. In addition, supervisor agreement in the form of task I-deals played an important role in this relationship by weakening the negative relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and external job change intention, but strengthened the positive relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and internal job change intention.

### 5.1 | Implications for theory and research

Our findings expand the careers literature, which has highlighted differences in job changes within and outside of organizations. For example, the careers literature has proposed that employee's perceived employability should be separated into within and outside of the organization components (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). Similarly, job mobility can be delineated between external and internal jobs (Feldman & Ng, 2007). While career studies emphasize the accumulated experience from jobs within and across organizations (Baruch & Rosenstein, 1992), most of the studies primarily examined career development through external job changes (Wang & Wanberg, 2017). We took a first step in rebalancing career research by differentiating internal from external job change intentions based on their differential relationships with the antecedent. Future research would benefit by



**FIGURE 1** (a) Simple slopes of employee well-being HR attribution on external job change intention at levels of task I-deals. (b) Simple slopes of employee well-being HR attribution on internal job change intention at levels of task I-deals

examining the differential impacts of internal and external job change intentions on employee outcomes such as job performance.

Our study also extends the careers literature by incorporating HR attribution theory to show that employee well-being HR attribution reduces external job change intention but increases the intention to change jobs within the same firm. The careers literature has yet to juxtapose both internal and external job change intentions and examine the role of HR attribution in both. Bringing in HR attribution theory, we extend job mobility theory (e.g., Feldman & Ng, 2007; Ng, Sorensen, Eby, & Feldman, 2007) by showing that employee well-being HR attribution (an individual perception of organizational HR practices) has a distinct impact on external and internal job change intention. We also contribute to the HR attribution literature by expanding the criterion domain of employee well-being HR attribution by including internal job change intention as an outcome and show that employee well-being HR attribution positively impacts on internal job change intention.

In addition, by examining the moderating effect of the supervisory practices, we extend the extant understanding of how employee HR attribution of organizational HR practices and the proximal/immediate supervisory practices in the form of task I-deals jointly shape different

mindsets pertaining to job change (within and across organizations). Prior theory and research on the attribution of HR practices and their impacts have left out the more proximal/immediate supervisory practices as contingencies. Our findings suggest that task I-deals strengthen the positive relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and internal job change intention, but weaken the negative relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and external job change intention. Therefore, we show the importance of considering the immediate supervisory level to enhance the precision of the prediction of attribution of organizational HR practices. Future research can further investigate how other supervisory practices such as empowering leadership behaviors can affect employees' different mindsets of job change interactively with employee attribution of organizational HR practices. These results contribute to the emerging research stream on task I-deals that have focused on the direct, positive effect of task I-deals on employee outcomes (Liao, Wayne, & Rousseau, 2016). The results provide evidence that supervisor actions in the form of task I-deals act as an important contingency influencing the impact of employee well-being HR attribution, thus extending studies that have primarily focused on task I-deals as a direct main effect. The flipside of the coin is that theory and research on task I-



deals should consider employee attribution of organizational level HR practices to better understand the impact of supervisor–employee level I-deals.

Our findings also contribute to the strategic human resource management (SHRM) literature by examining employees' attribution of the organization's intent in implementing HR practices for employee well-being. Extending the SHRM literature, which has examined contingent factors at the firm and team levels such as firm ownership (Liu, Gong, Zhou, & Huang, 2017), team cohesion and team task complexity (Chang, Jia, Takeuchi, & Cai, 2014) for the relationship between HR practices and employee outcomes, we demonstrated that supervisory practices also play an important role in facilitating the impact of employee attribution of HR practices.

## 5.2 | Practical implications

Our study provides several practical implications for organizations and managers. First, organizations should understand that employee attribution of HR practices in the organization can significantly influence employee mindsets toward internal and external job changes. Employees' beliefs that HR practices exist for their well-being have positive implications in reducing external job change intention and can increase job change intention within the organization. Thus, organizations who wish to make their HR practices effective should provide increased internal job opportunities to meet the desire from employees to advance the career through finding another job within the organization and to re-enforce employee well-being HR attribution. Our study also shows that employees have different perceptions on their HR practices even within the same firm (e.g., *SD* for employee well-being HR attribution = 1.12), suggesting that organizations should not only consider the content of HR practices but also be cognizant of how HR practices are communicated to employees which can influence why employees perceive HR practices exist.

In addition, our study highlights the notion that supervisors can play an important role in enhancing or mitigating the relationship between employee well-being attribution of HR practices and internal or external job change intention. Although supervisors often do not have full control over HR practices offered within the firm, our findings suggest that supervisors who extend idiosyncratic deals to an employee can decrease the importance of employee attribution of organizational HR practices in reducing external job change intention. Moreover, allowing these negotiated deals on job tasks can strengthen the relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and employee intention to find another job within the same organization. Thus, we recommend that managers need to understand the specific needs of each employee and utilize their authority to adjust the nature of their job to motivate them. While managers may not have full control over HR practices offered within the firm, task I-deals can be used as a lever that combines with employee well-being attribution to encourage internal job change intention among employees.

## 5.3 | Limitations and future research directions

The findings and implications of this study should be interpreted with its limitations in mind. First, we did not measure the actual provision of HR practices. The content of HR practices can affect employee's attitudes, behaviors, and well-being (Guest, 2017; Kooij et al., 2013). Hence, future research should consider the actual content of HR practices and employee HR attribution to integrate HR content with process (Sanders & Yang, 2016) and examine their independent and interactive effects on external and internal job change intentions.

Second, while our study examined the relationship between employee HR attribution and internal and external job change intentions, we focused on one type of HR attribution (i.e., employee well-being HR attribution). HR attribution categorization includes other types of attribution, such as external and commitment- and control-focused attributions (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008; Shantz, Arevshatian, Alfes, & Bailey, 2016; Van de Voorde & Beijer, 2015). The categorization of these different types and dimensions of HR attribution vary and have been inconsistently applied across the literature (Hewett, Shantz, Mundy, & Alfes, 2018). Therefore, although we focused on examining employee well-being HR attribution and task I-deals due to our focus on advancing the career through job change intentions, future research can also benefit by examining the combined impact of employees' transactional perceptions of the organization and supervisor on their job change intentions. For instance, future research can examine whether a control-focused attribution, such as reducing costs, combined with financial incentive I-deals (i.e., changes to compensation incentives negotiated with the supervisor, Rosen, Slater, Chang, & Johnson, 2013) can impact employees' internal and external job change intentions.

Third, our cross-sectional research design has a causality issue. While our predictions are based on theory that employee well-being HR attribution leads to the formation of internal and external job change intentions, employees may first develop internal or external job change intentions, which subsequently affect their perceptions of HR practices. It is also possible that employees may have an overall positive or negative impression of the organization which can affect both job change intentions and employee well-being HR attribution. Thus, we suggest future research to test the causal relationships among the variables more rigorously by using a longitudinal or an experimental study.

Fourth, while our study examines the moderating impact of task I-deals, we were unable to delve into the specific characteristics of jobs that were shown related to job change intention (Chang, Jia, Takeuchi, & Cai, 2014; De Vos & Cambré, 2017). For example, linking different types of job redesign to the actual characteristics of the job (i.e., how does job redesign result in task autonomy) may provide additional insights into job design theory. Therefore, examining what kinds of job characteristics can enhance or mitigate the effects of employee well-being HR attribution on external and internal job change intention can be a potential topic for future research. On a related note, while we differentiated between internal and external job change intentions, we were unable to identify the status of job movement

(i.e., lateral or upwards) desired by the employee. Specifically, employees may have the intention to change to a higher-level job (i.e., promotion), a same-level job, or completely switch occupations. These differences in job change status may have different impacts on external and internal job change intention (cf. Eby & Dematteo, 2000). Therefore, future research must investigate job change intentions by specifying the type of job movement intention related to the desired job (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Ng, Sorensen, Eby, & Feldman, 2007).

Fifth, the nature of the item wordings used to measure external job change intention (e.g., actively seeking an external job) captures a more active form of intention to leave compared to the nature of the item wordings used for internal job change intention (e.g., might search for an internal job). Possibly, the more passive item wordings for internal job change intention may result in stronger relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and internal job change intention as compared to external job change intention. Although we used the existing scales to measure external and internal job change intention, future research should validate our findings with the scales that are similar in terms of the activeness of external and internal job change intentions.

Sixth, we controlled for job alternatives within the organization, but job alternatives outside of the organization may affect job change intentions too. For example, perceived employability (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007) consists of internal and external employability components, which are important to internal career development and external job change as well (Steel & Griffeth, 1989). Future research should thus account for job alternatives outside the organization and examine the role of internal and external perceived employability in different job change intentions.

Lastly, the characteristics of the data used in this study which are derived from a single firm may limit the generalizability to other firms or industries. Also, while our sample reflects the workforce in 4S automobile stores, most respondents are male and young. Given that previous research has found that maintenance HR practices are more effective for old workers compared with developmental HR practices (Jung & Takeuchi, 2018; Kooij et al., 2013), variation may exist for different age groups in terms of what specific HR practices (e.g., performance appraisal and training and development) affect overall employee well-being HR attribution. Our sample consisting primarily of male employees may also impact the relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and different job change intentions, as previous research shows that workplace relationships are more important for females (Jiang, Liu, McKay, Lee, & Mitchell, 2012). Therefore, we suggest future research to validate our findings using samples from multiple organizations and other industries for employees with different demographics (e.g., old and female employees).

## 6 | CONCLUSION

Employees can advance their career by achieving job changes within and across organizations. This study points to the importance of

examining the antecedent and outcome of different mindsets of job change (i.e., intentions to change jobs within vs. across organizations). Our findings suggest that the immediate supervisory practice in the form of task I-ideals is an important boundary condition that modifies the relationship between employee well-being HR attribution and job change intentions. We hope that this study can stimulate future research on how the organizational and immediate supervisory practices through the eyes of employees jointly shape different mindsets of job change.

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